

Governor's Proposed FY23 Budget Adjustments
Appropriations Hearing
HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Thursday, February 24th, 2022

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee.

Hello, my name is Joseph J. Cintia and I am a registered voter from Waterbury, Connecticut. I am a client of DMHAS and receive help through Mental Health Connecticut. I have had mental health issues since I was 17 and know a lot about the stigma and struggles that mental illness can cause. I am here today to urge you to increase funding for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and thereby the non-profits they fund. I know all too well how someone can fall through the cracks. I did not know much about the help offered until I actually got into the system myself.

There is much more that needs to be done to keep the promise made to patients when the state mental hospitals were closed down. I know hospitalization is costly and its much better to keep people in outpatient programs not just for financial reasons but for their continued mental health.

I did not receive much care initially due to the stigma that mental illness causes, and my parents did not want me to continue treatment. It wasn't until I became an adult that I entered the system for care. I have had major depression for decades and have tried to commit suicide on several occasions.

These last two or three years has been especially challenging since the Covid 19 Virus Crisis has caused everyone to be mostly isolated. Isolation is a problem for me and I do not believe I could have coped without the help of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services as well as Mental Health Connecticut.

Mental Health Connecticut has helped me greatly by giving me virtual and in-person groups to attend during this time of crisis that we have been going through. They also help me and hundreds of others with food deliveries which help greatly during the current inflationary cycle. They have people to listen to me and others when we need it. Agencies like the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services help fund this and other non-profits that provide vital assistance to me and others during this especially stressful time.

It is vital to me and many others in the state of Connecticut that these programs be fully funded to keep us out of the hospital and functioning in our communities. The inflation we are experiencing has put pressure on everyone, and its important to keep up by increasing the budget so that these agencies and the people that run them can continue their valuable work in aiding the most needy and distressed in our society.

Private funds do not go far enough in supporting this vital non-profit infrastructure that so many, including myself, count on to get through tough times like the Covid 19 Virus Crisis. I hope that all of you, our representatives, keep in mind that we are all in need of support during these trying times. Now more than ever we need to increase the help that many people need to get through these tough times.

The people that run these agencies are under pressure by inflation and many are leaving the field due to finding jobs that pay better and have less stress in other industries. You may probably know someone who has or has had mental health issues, whether acute or chronic. Many of these people absolutely need the vital infrastructure of our mental health system. Please do not forget these people as you are crunching the numbers for next year's budget.

I have come here to put a face on the statistics and remind you that there are real people behind those numbers. I come here to advocate for me and others like me that have for too long been underserved

by our representatives. We do not have paid lobbyists and political action committees. We have to come here ourselves and testify on our own behalf.

It would do a world of good to increase funding for mental health in these times of crisis when so many are now under the stress of a pandemic. Its times like these that underscore the need for agencies like the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and non-profit agencies like Mental Health Connecticut. Its times like these that show the value of having a social safety net in our society.

Please fully fund these vital agencies, not just now but for the foreseeable future. It is vital that we do not forget the needy and most vulnerable in our society.

People who have in the past been forgotten, abandoned and left alone with terrible problems and deplorable life conditions. People who face the harsh bitter pain that comes from being in a bad condition through mental issues and addictions to drugs legal and illegal. People who you may know or have known that now are in dire straights and need the help you can fund for them.

There are many ways you can help. One is to increase the funding for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Others may help through giving to charities like the United Way and others. Some may go the extra mile and actually volunteer their time to assist the needy and unfortunate.

Non-profit agencies get a lot of funding through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. They get by with less and try to do more. With inflation and other industries to compete with, these agencies need more funding to keep up at this vital time when so many are under the stress of a pandemic and facing isolation.

You, our representatives, are in a position to help them at this time. Be there for them as they have been there for me and others. Give them the needed funds to continue this vital work. People that could be helped off the streets, away from drugs and alcohol and given a helping hand through their daily struggles.

Help the needy, the hungry and the marginalized. Be thankful you are not there yourself, but put a system in place that if you or someone you love needed it could be there. To not just give a hand out but a hand up. A place that has caring people ready to help those that need it. In these dark times, we all need to have a system in place to help those that cannot cope.

Increase the funding. Even if it means raiding the rainy day fund. This pandemic is one of the worst catastrophes we have ever had, its definitely raining. Give the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services the funds to help the most needy. Someone you love may someday need these services. Even the stranger on the street is a citizen that needs care at times. We need to have the social safety net strong and ready at times like these where so many have suffered so much for so long. There are many things in the budget that could be sacrificed with little notice, but needy and vulnerable people are not something to be taken lightly. These people are essential to society. They could be better citizens with some vital help at the right time. Do not sacrifice them for some magic number in the budget. Do not cut them out like you might cut taxes. Do not forget these people in their time of greatest need. Someone you love or care about could one day be among this group. Help one and you could help most. You cannot save everyone, but do not abrogate your responsibility to advocate for your voters and citizens at this our time of crisis.

Thank you for reading and listening to my testimony,

Sincerely, Joseph J. Cintia